

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

1 March 2011

**Report of the Chief Leisure Officer and the
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Arts and Youth**

Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken
by the Cabinet Member)**

1 EXTENSION OF SWIM SCHOOL PROGRAMME

Summary

This report outlines proposals to extend the existing Swim School programme at Larkfield Leisure Centre and Tonbridge Swimming Pool. The proposals include a move to continuous assessment of pupils over a rolling 45 week programme and the ability for customers to spread the cost of payment through a monthly direct debit. The report is brought forward following a detailed audit of the existing programme and an extensive customer survey.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Council operates extensive Swim School programmes at both Larkfield Leisure Centre and Tonbridge Swimming Pool. The Swim Schools currently attract around 1,600 customers per week, ranging from Parent and Toddler classes to Adult Beginners. The bulk of the programme operates under the Amateur Swimming Association National Plan for the Teaching of Swimming.

1.1.2 The Swim Schools operate during term time only and the revised estimate of income in 2010/11 is just in excess of £380,000.

1.1.3 The Leisure Contracts Manager has become aware of the increasing number of operators in the public sector who are providing swimming lessons on a continuous assessment basis for up to 50 weeks per annum. As a consequence an audit of the existing Swim School was commissioned in late 2009 by an industry specialist.

1.1.4 The audit findings identified a wide range of recommendations and development opportunities taking into account current practice and local demographics, and these have been developed into a number of proposals. The proposals also reflect feedback from an extensive customer survey, competitor analysis and meetings with Swim School teachers.

1.1.5 In addition, the Leisure Contracts Manager has utilised his role as Chair of the South East Leisure Centre Operators (SELCO) to facilitate a meeting of member organisations to discuss and debate the issue of continuous assessment swim schools. The meeting was attended by 11 organisations across the South East of which 8 are already offering continuous assessment. This meeting proved very valuable in forming the proposals outlined in this report.

1.2 Proposals

1.2.1 The outline proposals for the extension of the Swim School at Larkfield Leisure Centre and Tonbridge Swimming Pool fall into a number of broad categories outlined below.

1.2.2 Continuous Assessment – the philosophy of continuous assessment provides pupils with the ability to move through the stages of the Swim School programme based upon ability rather than the constraints of fixed term courses. This style of approach to pupil advancement lends itself to removal of termly courses with the programme running up to 50 weeks per annum. It is the view of the Leisure Contracts Manager that a 45 week programme would best fit with the existing profile of use of this Council's facilities, allowing a two and five week break at Christmas and in the summer holidays respectively.

1.2.3 Rolling Enrolment – the approach outlined above allows customers to enrol in the Swim School at any point in the year, subject to availability. This not only benefits the customer but removes the need for costly and administratively burdensome enrolment weeks at the beginning of each term.

1.2.4 Cost and Payment Arrangements – the current payment arrangements are based upon a unit cost per 30 minute lesson. Parents are required to pay in advance on a termly basis. This can prove a costly one off payment experience, especially for families with more than one child in the Swim School. In future, whilst the payment will be based on the same unit cost, customers will have the option to pay by monthly direct debit in order to spread the cost. Those who wish to continue to pay termly will be offered 15 week block payment options. It is anticipated that direct debit payments will be incentivised by discounts and/or free access for casual swimming. Consideration will also be given to outsourcing the direct debit collections.

1.2.5 Information Technology – course administration is currently managed by a combination of manual and electronic intervention. Continuous assessment will require the use of software linked to the existing leisure management software package. Online payment options are currently being advanced and will apply in future to those wishing to continue to pay on a termly basis.

1.2.6 Swim School Co-ordinator – the implementation of a continuous assessment Swim School will require the appointment of a dedicated Swim School Co-ordinator. This role will acquire responsibility for programming, customer liaison,

supervision of teaching staff, a link to administrative processes and the important function of direct customer liaison.

- 1.2.7 Teaching Staff – the existing Swim School staff are all employed on a casual basis. The proposals would require the offer of a form of permanent employment to the staff, which will provide greater continuity of teaching which provides customer benefits. The Leisure Contracts Manager is currently considering the way forward in liaison with Personnel Services.
- 1.2.8 Teaching Plan – consideration will be given to a Teaching Plan that remains based upon the National Plan for the Teaching of Swimming but incorporates a more flexible approach to lesson planning. This will further facilitate continuous assessment. Consideration will also be given to ‘premium’ priced lessons that offer customers smaller class sizes for an increased fee.

1.3 Customer Survey Results

1.3.1 A customer survey has been undertaken to gauge response to some of the outline proposals. 363 completed questionnaires have been analysed and the results show that:

- 70% of respondents were either very interested or interested in continuous assessment. 20% were unsure, with only 10% claiming not to be interested;
- 75% of respondents were either very interested or interested in payment by direct debit. 10% were unsure, with only 15% claiming not to be interested; and
- 81% of respondents were either very interested or interested in premium priced classes. 12% were unsure, with only 7% claiming not to be interested. 50% of respondents were prepared to pay £10 per lesson for smaller classes with a further 20% prepared to pay even more.

1.3.2 It is felt that the survey results show strong support to develop the Swim School along the lines of the proposals.

1.4 Staff Consultation

1.4.1 The Leisure Contracts Manager has held an informal meeting with teaching staff at both centres to share the audit findings and discuss the potential changes. In general terms the proposals were well received. One or two existing teachers expressed a clear desire to remain term time only employees and this can be accommodated.

1.5 Financial Implications

1.5.1 The audit findings indicated the potential for a significant increase in income through the implementation of a continuous assessment Swim School. This will be achieved by a number of specific actions shown below;

- Extension of the scheme from 38 to 45 weeks;
- Increased occupancy through more streamlined movement through the programme stages and reduced waiting times;
- Increased number of classes and teaching stations including premium priced lessons; and
- Increased retention in the latter stages of the programme including skills training options such as Rookie Lifeguard.

1.5.2 The above will be offset in part by additional staffing costs, however, a net positive impact on the profitability of the Swim School is anticipated. The Leisure Contracts Manager is currently preparing financial forecasts in liaison with the Director of Finance, which will be reported to the next meeting of this Board.

1.6 Timescale

1.6.1 It is proposed to introduce the continuous assessment approach to the Swim School from 1 September 2011. In order to achieve the timescale, arrangements need to be finalised prior to the normal re-enrolment dates at the end of the summer term in July 2011.

1.6.2 It is the intention to inform existing and new customers through a series of newsletters, the site specific websites, e-mail communication and direct poolside engagement.

1.6.3 Arrangements for teaching staff need to be confirmed by 1 September 2011.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 None.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 As outlined in the report the proposals are expected to produce a net income benefit to the Leisure Services Business Unit. Further detailed analysis will be undertaken in liaison with the Director of Finance and reported to the next meeting of this Board.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 The Indoor Leisure Operational Risk Register highlights the need to achieve annual financial targets for the facilities and that the result of failure to manage the associated risks could be financial, contractual and professional. The proposals above will assist in reducing the outlined risks by increasing income to the Leisure Services Business Unit.

1.10 Equality Impact Assessment

1.10.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report.

1.11 Policy Considerations

1.11.1 Business Continuity/Resilience, Healthy Lifestyles and Young People.

1.12 Conclusions and Recommendations

1.12.1 It is apparent that an opportunity to improve the existing Swim School programme and generate increased income exists. The proposed changes will improve the service to the customer and provide easier payment options in line with the findings of the recent customer survey.

1.12.2 It is, therefore **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that the proposals to amend the Swim Schools at Larkfield Leisure Centre and Tonbridge Swimming Pool outlined in the report be pursued, with an implementation date of 1 September 2011, subject to a further report to the next meeting of this Board.

The Chief Leisure Officer confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Martin Guyton

Nil

Robert Styles
Chief Leisure Officer

Martin Coffin
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth & Arts

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The Swim School programme at Larkfield Leisure Centre and Tonbridge Swimming Pool and access to the facilities is inclusive.

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	The proposals will assist customers in terms of affordability and potential access to children who may benefit from being taught in smaller groups.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Not applicable

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.